

CHAPTER 8:

Joseph, Part II; the New Kingdom

The Redemption of Judah

In Chapter 7, we read how **Joseph's** brothers sold him into slavery. He wound up in Egypt, where he rose from bottom to top three times— always with God's help. The first time, he rose from lowly slave to head of his master's household. The second time, he rose from jailbird to jail master. The third time, he rose to the second-highest office in all Egypt: **vizier** to the pharaoh!

Joseph was the eleventh son of Jacob, son of Isaac, son of Abraham.

The royal **vizier** was the pharaoh's top officer.

A **famine** is a time of horrible hunger.

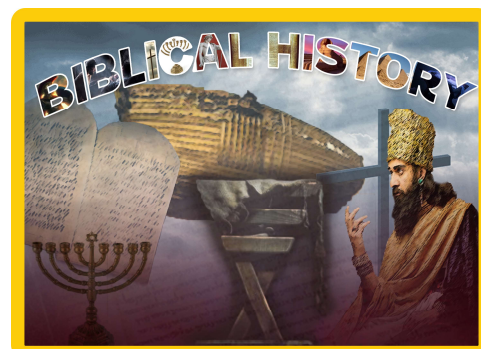
We also read why the pharaoh made Joseph his vizier: because only Joseph understood the pharaoh's strange dreams. One dream showed seven thin cows eating seven fat cows; while the other showed seven sick heads of grain eating seven healthy heads. Joseph explained what both dreams meant: that Egypt would have seven years of plenty, followed by seven years of **famine**.

Besides explaining dreams, Joseph also laid out a plan for saving Egypt. While the years of plenty lasted, the pharaoh must store up mountains of grain— so that when the bad years came, he would be ready.

It all works out just the way Joseph said it would. With the pharaoh's permission, Joseph spends the next seven years storing up grain. When the bad years come, he starts selling what he's stored. He has so much that Egypt is in no danger of running out.

The famine doesn't just hit Egypt. It also hits the lands around Egypt— including Canaan, where Joseph's brothers live. When Father Jacob hears that Egypt still has grain, he sends his sons to buy some. Only one son does he hold back: the youngest, Benjamin.

Why does Jacob hold Benjamin back? Because Benjamin and Joseph came from Rachel, the only wife Jacob really loved. Twenty years after the other brothers sold Joseph, Jacob still believes that Joseph is dead. He can't bear the thought of losing Benjamin too.



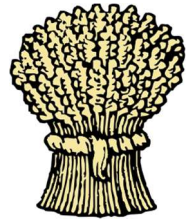
"... and Joseph opened the storehouses and sold..."
— Genesis 41:56



"Joseph's brothers came and bowed down before him..."
— Genesis 42:6

When the brothers get to Egypt, they find that there's more to buying grain than just handing over silver. The Egyptians only sell to people they trust, which means that the brothers must talk an officer into trusting them. They have no idea that the officer they're talking to is the brother they sold into slavery!

Of course, Joseph knows his brothers the moment he lays eyes on them. Their first meeting in twenty years starts with a familiar sight. The brothers bow low before Joseph, “with their faces to the earth.” Joseph can’t help remembering the dream he had back in Genesis 37— the one that showed his brothers’ sheaves of wheat all bowing down to his.



After what his brothers did to him, Joseph would be foolish to trust them without testing them first. Before he tells them who he is, he wants to know: Are they the same evil men now that they were back then, or have they learned from their mistake?

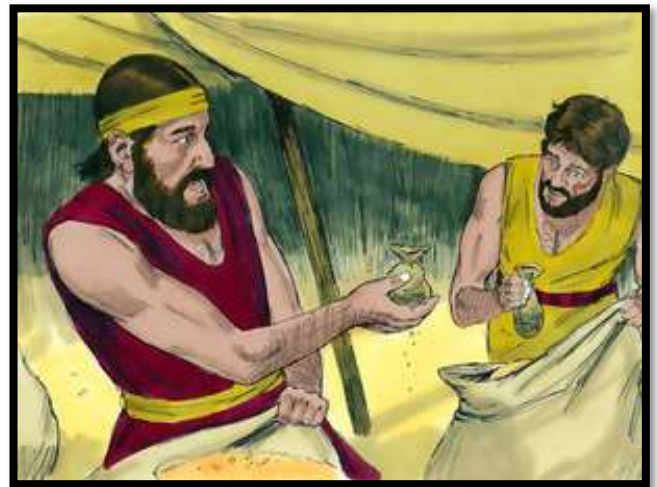
Joseph also wants to know about the rest of the family. The ten brothers in front of him are all the half-brothers who sold him into slavery. Joseph wants to know what happened to his only full brother, Benjamin. Did the brothers get rid of Benjamin in a fit of jealousy, the way they did Joseph? Or is Benjamin back home in Canaan, as the brothers say he is? And of course, Joseph would love to know how his old father Jacob is doing.

Joseph starts his test by accusing his brothers of spying on Egypt. He says it three times, and then tosses them in jail for three days. Maybe Joseph wants his brothers to know how it feels to be in jail; for after all, it is partly their fault that he spent so much time in jail.

At the end of those three days, Joseph changes his plan. Before now, he’d planned to send one brother back to Jacob. Now he plans to send all of them back except one: the second-oldest, **Simeon**. He orders the others to bring Benjamin back to Egypt, so that he’ll know they’re telling the truth.

This first test brings the first sign of hope. The thought of leaving Simeon behind terrifies the brothers; for they know what their father will say. They think that God must be punishing them for the awful sin of selling their own brother. The thought that his brothers are sorry for their sin brings tears to Joseph’s eyes.

Having no other choice, nine brothers leave Simeon behind and set out for home. What they don’t know is that Joseph is still testing them. When they get back to Jacob, they all open their sacks of grain— and find silver inside. For some reason, that strange Egyptian officer has given back all the silver they paid him!

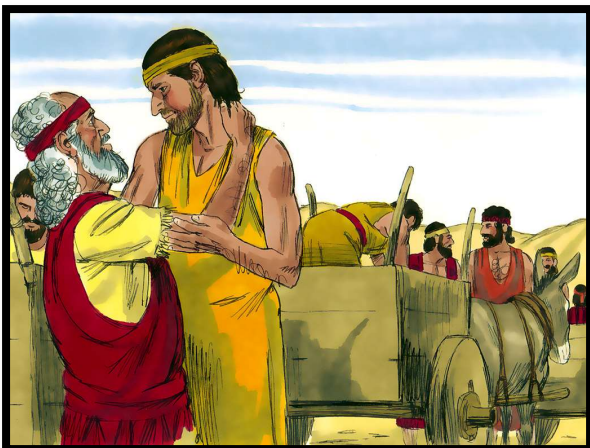


“... each man’s bundle of money was in his sack...”
— Genesis 42:35

What is this new test all about? The answer goes back twenty years, to when Joseph’s brothers sold him for twenty shekels of silver. If they keep the silver in their sacks now, then Joseph will know that they still love silver more than they love their own brother— in this case, Simeon.

The sight of the silver makes Father Jacob nervous. He senses that the brothers aren’t being honest with him; so he refuses to send Benjamin to Egypt with them.

Then, of course, the grain runs out. Poor Jacob is down to two choices: let Benjamin go to Egypt, or let his whole family starve. Reluctantly, he lets Benjamin go. For the second time, ten brothers set out for Egypt. When they get there, they try to give Joseph his silver back— which means that they pass another test.



“Take your brother also, and arise, go back to the man.”
— Genesis 43:13

This time, Joseph invites his brothers to lunch— including Simeon, whom he now sets free. The brothers are enjoying a nice meal when they notice something strange. For some reason, Joseph’s servants pile food on Benjamin’s plate until he has five times as much as the others!

Why does Benjamin get so much? Probably because Joseph isn’t finished testing. He wants to know if the brothers are as jealous of Benjamin now as they were of Joseph before. But if they are, then they don’t show it. The meal ends with eleven brothers heading home, each with a sack full of grain.

Then Joseph springs another trap. Unknown to the brothers, he has hidden a valuable silver cup in one of their sacks. After they leave, he sends a servant to ask them about the cup. The brothers all swear that none of them has it; but alas, it isn’t true. For when the servant searches the sacks, he finds the silver cup in the last one: Benjamin’s!



It looks like Father Jacob’s worst fear is coming true. When the brothers get back to Joseph, he demands a high price for the stolen cup. The others are free to go, but Benjamin must stay behind in Egypt— as Joseph’s slave!

This business with the silver cup is Joseph’s last test for his brothers. Why does he put the cup in Benjamin’s sack? Because he is dying to know: Will the brothers let their father’s favorite become a slave, as they once did to Joseph? Or have they changed enough to sacrifice themselves for Benjamin? The answer comes from the fourth-oldest brother: **Judah**, who now has his finest hour.



“Joseph’s Brothers Find the Silver Goblet in Benjamin’s Sack”
by Alexander Ivanov



“Judah and Joseph” by Arent de Gelder

The speech that starts in Genesis 44:18 is the longest in the Old Testament, and one of the most beautiful. Judah starts by reminding Joseph who Benjamin is and how he got here. Although Jacob has twelve sons, only two of them are close to his heart: the two who came from his favorite wife. He has already lost one of them, much to his grief. He can’t stand to lose Benjamin too. The brothers never would have brought Benjamin to Egypt if Joseph hadn’t ordered them to.

Now the worst has happened, Judah says. Before setting out for Egypt, Judah personally promised Jacob that he would bring Benjamin back safe and sound. If he doesn’t, then the old man will surely die of grief; and it will be all Judah’s fault. Judah can’t stand to see that happen. He asks Joseph to make him a slave instead, and let Benjamin go free— so that he won’t have to watch his old father die!

If Joseph has been waiting for proof that his brothers have changed, then here it is. What Judah says here is the exact opposite of what he did to Joseph before. Back then, he was so jealous of Joseph that he was ready to murder him. Now he protects his father's new favorite, Benjamin. Back then, it was Judah's idea to sell Joseph into slavery. Now he offers to become a slave himself, so that Benjamin won't have to. Back then, he lied to Jacob about what happened to Joseph. He has watched his father grieve for all these years without ever telling him the truth. Now he sacrifices himself for Benjamin, so that he won't have to watch his father grieve again.

Judah's speech is too much for Joseph. He sends everyone else away, so that he can be alone with his brothers when he finally tells them who he is. We've already seen Joseph shed tears twice. Now we see it a third time. His sobs are so loud that even the Egyptians outside hear them.

Now that they know who Joseph is, the brothers are ashamed of themselves for what they did to him. But Joseph tells them not to be; for there is more going on than meets the eye. He says that God has been behind everything that's happened, from the time his brothers sold him until now. In other words, Joseph says in Genesis 45:8, "...it was not you who sent me here, but God."



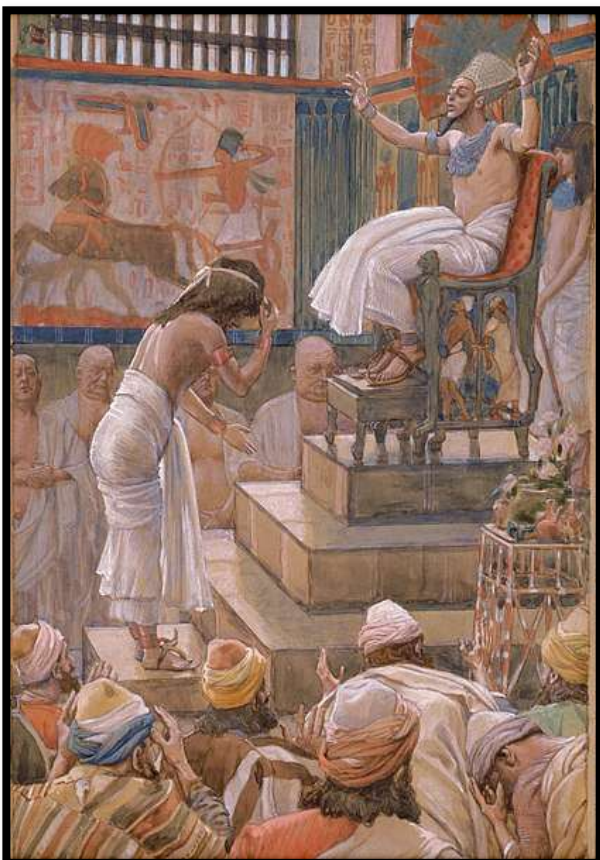
"Joseph Recognized by His Brothers" by Leon Pierre Bourgeois

What a strange idea! What the brothers did to Joseph was surely a terrible sin. How can a good God have anything to do with something so terrible? Yet that is exactly what Joseph says. God wanted Joseph in Egypt to explain the pharaoh's dreams and lead the world through the coming famine. If He hadn't sent Joseph, then many more people would have died. Joseph says it again in Genesis 50:20, where he tells his brothers: "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive." What men and women mean for evil, almighty God can turn to good.

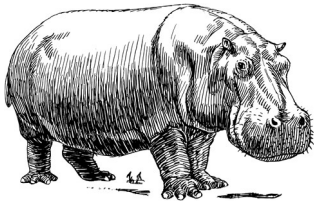


The story of Joseph ends with a big change in the life of every Jew. The pharaoh is so fond of Joseph that when he hears about his brothers, he invites the whole family to Egypt. He sends enough carts to carry all their belongings, and promises them the best land in Egypt.

When the family comes, the pharaoh makes good on his promise. They settle in a part of Egypt called **Goshen**, probably on the east side of the Nile Delta. While the rest of the world is still suffering through famine, the Jews are all safe in Egypt— for now.



"Joseph and His Brethren Welcomed by Pharaoh" by James Tissot



A Pool Full of Hippos

The rest of this chapter takes us back to Egyptian history. In Chapter 7, we read how Egypt went back and forth from strength to weakness. First came the glory days of the Old Kingdom, when the mighty pharaohs of the Fourth **Dynasty** built the biggest pyramids ever. Then came the first days of weakness: a glory-less time called the First Intermediate Period.

The glory days returned near the end of the Eleventh Dynasty, when Pharaoh Mentuhotep II started the Middle Kingdom. The Twelfth Dynasty was even more glorious than the Eleventh. After that, though, came more weakness. From the Thirteenth Dynasty through the Seventeenth, Egypt suffered through a hard time called the Second Intermediate Period.

The worst of it was, two of those dynasties weren't even Egyptian. Before now, all Egypt had been ruled by Egyptian pharaohs. Now foreign pharaohs broke off pieces of Egypt. The first foreign dynasty, the Fourteenth, broke off the rich **Nile Delta**— seizing it from the Egyptian pharaohs of the Thirteenth Dynasty.

The next foreign dynasty broke off a lot more. The pharaohs of the Fifteenth Dynasty came from one of the worst enemies Egypt ever had: a strong people called the **Hyksos**. The Hyksos had weapons the Egyptians had never seen before, like chariots and composite bows. They used those weapons to seize all **Lower Egypt**, and even part of **Upper Egypt**.

The next dynasty was the weakest yet. Historians aren't sure whether the Sixteenth Dynasty was Egyptian, Hyksos, or a mixture of both. Whatever it was, it lost most of the ground the Egyptians had left. It took three pharaohs from the next Egyptian dynasty, the **Seventeenth Dynasty**, to turn things around.

The turnaround started with an argument between two pharaohs: one from the Fifteenth Dynasty, the other from the Seventeenth. The first was a Hyksos called **Apepi**, who ruled from a city called **Avaris**. The second was an Egyptian called **Sekenenre**, who ruled from **Thebes**. According to one ancient **papyrus**, the cause of the argument was a pool full of hippos that



A **dynasty** is a line of rulers who all come from the same family.

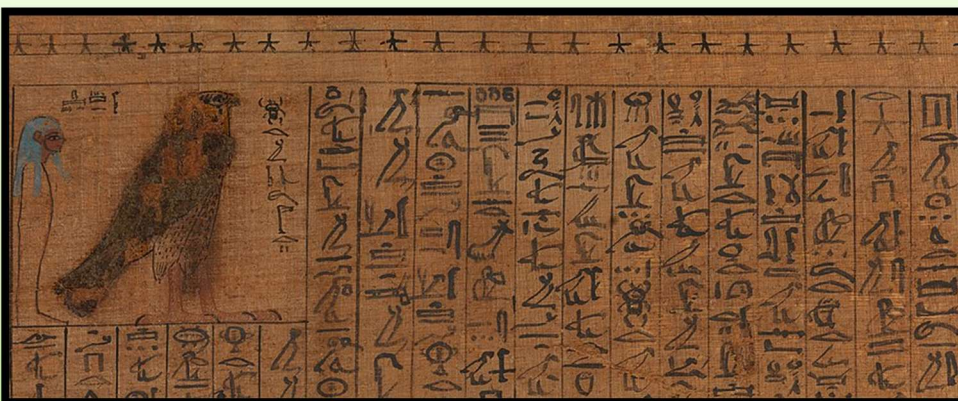
The **Nile Delta** is a triangle of rich farmland down near the Mediterranean Sea.

Lower Egypt stood down the Nile, which means to the north. **Upper Egypt** stood up the Nile, which means to the south.

Avaris was a Hyksos capital that stood on the eastern edge of the Nile Delta.

Thebes was an Egyptian capital that stood about 400 miles south of the Mediterranean Sea.

Papyrus was an Egyptian writing material made of pressed reeds.



A fragment of papyrus covered with hieroglyphs

Sekenenre kept at Thebes. The two pharaohs were at peace until around 1560 BC, when Apepi ordered Sekenenre to get rid of his hippos. He complained that the noisy hippos were keeping him awake at night— which was impossible, since Avaris was hundreds of miles from Thebes!

What was really going on? The answer starts with a look at how the Egyptians taught stories about their gods. Besides just telling the stories, they also acted them out in plays. If the pharaoh had a part in the story, then he played it himself. The gods were often played by animals; for each god had an animal or two that was special to it.

That probably explains why Sekenenre kept hippos at Thebes: so that they could play their part in a story about the gods. The story he had in mind was probably the one we covered in Chapter 2: the myth of Osiris, Set and Horus.

The hippo was the special animal of Set, the evil god who killed Osiris and seized the throne of Egypt. The hero of the myth was Osiris' son Horus, who speared Set and took back his father's throne. Just as Horus speared Set in the myth, so Sekenenre could spear a hippo in a play. By acting out the myth, Sekenenre was saying that he was the rightful ruler of all Egypt— just like Horus before him.



Horus spearing Set, who is in the form of a hippo

That probably explains why the Hyksos pharaoh ordered Sekenenre to get rid of his hippos: because he didn't want him playing Horus. He wanted Sekenenre to know that the Egyptian pharaohs were finished, and that the Hyksos pharaohs were now the rightful rulers of all Egypt!

Sekenenre didn't stand for it. Instead of getting rid of his hippos, he made war on the Hyksos— trying to drive them out of Egypt for good. Alas, the war ended badly for Sekenenre. When archaeologists found his mummy, the skull was full of holes— probably made by Hyksos battleaxes.



The good news was that the next two pharaohs picked up where Sekenenre left off. His son Kamose won many battles against the Hyksos; but it was Kamose' brother **Ahmose** who finished the job.

Around 1550 BC, Pharaoh **Ahmose I** finally conquered the Hyksos and took back all Egypt.

Milestones are big events that mark endings and beginnings.

A win that big was a historic **milestone**. The end of the Hyksos meant that the Second Intermediate Period was over, and so was the Seventeenth Dynasty. Ahmose was the first pharaoh of the first great dynasty since Middle Kingdom times: the **Eighteenth Dynasty**. His rise marks the start of Egypt's third, most glorious time of strength: the **New Kingdom**.



A possible sculpture of Pharaoh Ahmose I



Ahmose I driving the Hyksos out of Egypt

The New Kingdom started with more conquering. After finishing the Hyksos off, Ahmose pushed his border to the northeast— into the land of Canaan. He also pushed his border to the south— back into Nubia, which Egypt had lost during the Second Intermediate Period.

Ahmose's grandson, Pharaoh **Thutmose I**, was hardly seated on his throne when the Nubians rebelled against him. A writing from a general's tomb tells how Thutmose handled their rebellion. First, he boated up the Nile and killed the King of Nubia— with an arrow from his own bow. Second, he tied the king upside down to the prow of his ship. Third, he carried his dead enemy all the way back down the Nile— showing all the world how Egypt punished rebels.



Broken sculpture of Hatshepsut

Besides problems with rebels, Thutmose I also had a problem with his heir. Thutmose had many wives, but only one royal wife. The problem was, his royal wife gave him no sons— only a daughter called

Hatshepsut. His son was born to a lesser wife, which meant that he was only royal on his father's side. Thutmose I feared that without more royal blood, his son might not be accepted as pharaoh.

The solution, Thutmose decided, was a royal wedding. Before he died, he ordered his daughter Hatshepsut to marry one of his sons: the future **Thutmose II**. The fact that Hatshepsut was marrying her half-brother didn't matter, only that she had the royal blood he needed.

The next generation ran into the same problem. Although Hatshepsut did give Thutmose II a daughter, she didn't give him the son he needed to carry on his dynasty. His only son was born to a lesser wife, just as he himself was.

The solution this time was different. When Thutmose II died, Hatshepsut somehow managed to rule in his place— even though she was a woman. She may have been a **regent** for her dead husband's son, the future Thutmose III; or she may have ruled in her own name. Either way,

A **regent** is an officer who makes decisions for a ruler who is too young or sick to decide for himself.

Hatshepsut made all the decisions— which makes her the first great female pharaoh.

Hatshepsut was more a builder than a conqueror. She built more temples, set up more monuments and carved more sculptures than any pharaoh before her. She carved her name into every one of them, as if to say that a woman had every right to be pharaoh.

Alas for Hatshepsut, her carved names didn't last. After she died, someone chiseled them off everything she'd built— as if he wanted to erase her from history. The usual suspect is her dead husband's son,

Twelve Pharaohs of the Eighteenth Dynasty

1. Ahmose I
2. Amenhotep I
3. Thutmose I
4. Thutmose II
5. Hatshepsut
6. Thutmose III "the Great"
7. Amenhotep II
8. Thutmose IV "the Dreamer"
9. Amenhotep III "the Magnificent"
10. Amenhotep IV, a.k.a. Akhenaten
11. Tutankhamun, a.k.a. King Tut
12. Ay



Pharaoh Thutmose III

Thutmose III. He may have hated Hatshepsut for years, longing for the day when he would be old enough to take her place.

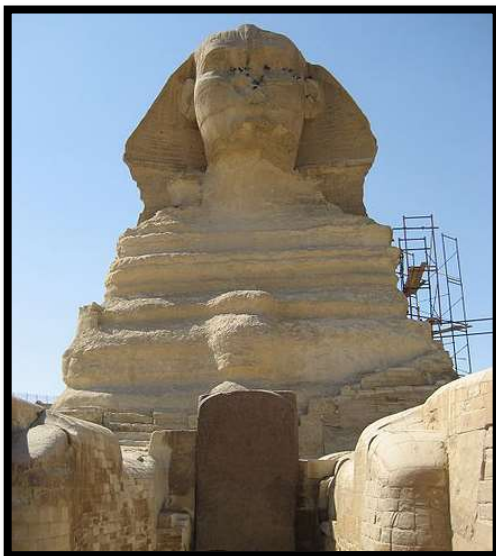
However he may have felt,

Thutmose III turned out to be a great pharaoh in his own right. The Egyptian Empire was never bigger than it was in his day, around 1450 BC. The empire was just as big under his son, Pharaoh **Amenhotep II**.

The pharaoh after Amenhotep II is best remembered for a dream he had— or at least, one he said he had. It happened at the Great Sphinx of Giza, which we covered in Chapter 2. By New Kingdom times, the sphinx was mostly buried in sand— with only its head sticking out. One of Amenhotep's sons was resting against the head one day, starting to doze, when the sphinx-god spoke to him in a dream. It said that if he would dig the sphinx out and fix it up, then the sphinx-god would make him pharaoh one day!



The Egyptian Empire at its biggest, under Thutmose III around 1450 BC



The Dream Stele standing between the paws of the Great Sphinx. A stele was a column carved from stone and set up as a monument.

Why would a son of a pharaoh need the sphinx-god to make him pharaoh? Probably because he wasn't the oldest son. The oldest son may have died young, or he may have been pushed aside somehow. Either way, he was out of the picture—which meant that the throne would go to a younger son. Maybe that was why this son spread the story of his dream: to get ahead of his brothers. A son who heard from the sphinx-god would have a big advantage over one who didn't.

Whether or not the dream was real, this son acted like it was. Upon taking his father's place, Pharaoh **Thutmose IV** dug out the Great Sphinx and fixed it up— just as he'd promised the sphinx-god. The story of his dream is carved into a monument that still stands between the sphinx's front paws: the **Dream Stele**.

The next pharaoh may have been the most glorious ever. Thutmose IV's son, Pharaoh **Amenhotep III**, was one of the richest men of all time— so rich that he is called Amenhotep the Magnificent. His riches show in the amount of art he ordered. Archaeologists have found more than 250 sculptures of Amenhotep III, scattered from one end of the Egyptian Empire to the other.



Two 60-foot-tall statues of Amenhotep III near what was once Thebes

The Heretic Pharaoh

Heretic can mean “anyone whose ideas are different than most people’s.”

By Amenhotep III’s day, the Eighteenth Dynasty was so glorious that it was hard to imagine it ever falling. But it finally did fall, of course. The trouble started in the days of the next pharaoh, who tried something both hard and dangerous: changing Egypt’s religion.



Akhenaten and his wife Nefertiti worshipping the Aten

In his fifth year as pharaoh, **Amenhotep IV** brought a new idea to Egypt. What he had in mind was so special that he didn’t even call it a god. He just called it the **Aten**, saying that it was above all gods. Although he drew the Aten as a sun disk, it meant more than just the sun. He said that the Aten not only created the world, but also gave it life every day. He wanted all Egyptians to forget their old gods, and start worshipping the Aten instead.

To show everyone how serious he was, Amenhotep changed his name. His old name honored an old Egyptian god called **Amun**. Now he switched

to **Akhenaten**, meaning “Most Useful to the Aten.”

What Akhenaten did next was even more serious. He decided that his old capital, Thebes, didn’t suit his new religion; for the temples and monuments there had all been

Amun was one of the main gods worshiped at Thebes.

Akhetaten meant “Horizon of the Aten.”
Amarna is a newer name for Akhetaten.

built for the old gods. The solution was an all-new capital called **Akhetaten**, a.k.a. **Amarna**. Akhenaten lined the streets of Amarna with new temples and monuments, all built for the Aten alone.

Historians are of two minds about Akhenaten. Some take him at his word, saying that he truly believed in the Aten. Others think he had a more sinister reason for changing religions. The proof, they say, is in a song called the “Great Hymn to the Aten.”

The “Great Hymn to the Aten” is a praise song written by Akhenaten himself. Near the end of the hymn, Akhenaten writes that he alone knows how to worship the Aten. Where the old gods had many priests, the Aten had just one: Akhenaten. Some historians think that was why he changed religions: not because he believed, but because he wanted to be the only priest. Perhaps the priests of old gods like Amun were getting too powerful for him. Changing religions may have been his way of taking power back from the priests.

Alas for Akhenaten, his new religion didn’t stick. He was hardly in his grave when the old priests of Amun came roaring back. The change shows in Akhenaten’s son, who had two names like his father—but in reverse. The son started as Tutankhaten, which honored the Aten; but he ended as **Tutankhamun**, which honored Amun.

Pharaoh Tutankhamun, a.k.a. **King Tut**, was just a boy when he took over for his father. He was still just a boy when he married his half-sister: a poor rich girl called **Ankhesenamun**. He was a boy still



Death mask of Pharaoh Tutankhamun

when he died, probably around age eighteen— leaving no children to take his place.

What happened next is unsure; for the ancient writing that tells the story gives no names or dates. One way of explaining it starts with the highest officer in Tutankhamun's army: an old general called **Ay**.

It is said that after Tut died, Ay pushed Tut's widow to marry him— hoping to become pharaoh through her. But Tut's widow wanted nothing to do with Ay. To save herself from the old general, she wrote a friendly letter to the next empire north: the **Hittite Empire**.

The **Hittite Empire** grew up in Asia Minor. See Chapter 10 for more on the Hittites.

Her plan was a simple one. Tut's widow had heard that the King of the Hittites had plenty of strong sons. She asked him to

send one of them to Egypt, so that she could marry him instead of Ay. If it worked, then a Hittite prince would become Pharaoh of Egypt— without anyone firing a shot!

Alas for Tut's widow, her plan didn't work. Ay found out about the letter somehow, and was ready and waiting for the Hittite prince. The young man was dead before he ever got to Egypt. Once his rival was out of the way, Ay forced Tut's widow to marry him— which explains how a non-royal like Ay became the next Pharaoh of Egypt.

With that, the great Eighteenth Dynasty was all but finished. After one more pharaoh, it gave way to the next New Kingdom dynasty: the Nineteenth Dynasty, which we'll get to in Chapter 11.



Tutankhamun with his sister-wife Ankhesenamun

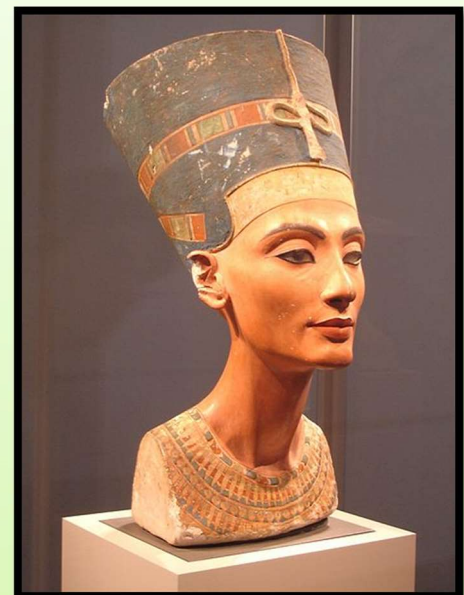
FASCINATING FINDS: The Nefertiti Bust

The time of Akhenaten is called the Amarna Period, after the new capital he built to go with his new religion. The art of the Amarna Period is different from other Egyptian art. Where other artists tried to make royals look like gods, Amarna artists made them like real people. The best example is a bust of Akhenaten's favorite wife: **Queen Nefertiti**, whose name meant "The Beauty Has Come."

Soon after Akhenaten died, both his religion and his capital were abandoned. Amarna stayed mostly abandoned until 1912, when German archaeologists started digging there. They were digging in an artist's studio when they found one of the most beautiful sculptures from all ancient times: the now-famous **Nefertiti Bust**.

The Germans knew right away that the Nefertiti Bust was something special; and they wanted it for Germany. The problem was, they had promised the Egyptians first choice of all the artifacts they found. A beauty like the Nefertiti Bust was sure to be first on the Egyptians' list, unless the Germans found a way to distract them.

Different people tell different tales about how the Nefertiti Bust got to Germany. Some say the Germans hid its beauty by covering it with grime. They also say the Germans lied about the bust— claiming it was made of cheap plaster, when it was really made of rich limestone with a plaster coat. Whether they lied or not, the bust is still in Germany as of 2020.



The world-famous Nefertiti Bust on display in Berlin, Germany